

# Closing Statement

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As a graduate student of international relations at Webster University Geneva, one of the very first things I learned about upon entering Webster was this annual humanitarian conference organized by the international relations department. I had no idea at the time that I would come to be so intimately involved in the planning of said conference but it has really been my pleasure to do so. I think you will agree that it has been enlightening on many levels and well worth the time and effort put into it.

The first thing I would like to do is express my gratitude and that of the collective community of Webster University Geneva for both your interest and participation in our 11<sup>th</sup> annual humanitarian conference. This conference is the single most important community event organized by Webster Geneva and over the years has come to symbolize what we can achieve when people from various backgrounds and experiences convene to teach and learn from one another. Each year, this conference is held under the auspices of the government of Geneva and has earned a distinguished reputation in this truly international community for its contributions to humanitarian awareness and education.

In the last 15 years we have seen a tremendous plague of conflicts producing large numbers of victims, refugees, murders, internally displaced peoples, genocide, torture, human trafficking, etc. It used to be that all these things were happening elsewhere in far away places, there was the feeling that these issues were none of our business. But this clearly cannot and is not the case any longer.

Over the past day and a half, we have been presented with many different points of view and experiences from experts in the humanitarian realm. The objective of the conference was to highlight the multiple aspects of an important and topical international humanitarian issue – humanitarian action as an interplay among three major actors – governments, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations. What we have seen is that new approaches are emerging and old ones being rethought as to how to tackle humanitarian crises of all kinds: natural disasters, man-made disasters, internal conflicts, genocide, etc.

What has been the take home message? One of the overarching themes of the conference has been that humanitarian action of any kind has to be carried out in an organized collective way among partnerships between the actors involved. Partnerships or alliances allow for more efficient and effective delivery of humanitarian action. No one has the monopoly on humanitarian work; the responsibility is as it should be shared by many.

We also discussed the importance of public health and human rights laws. Crisis management by the various agencies has come up as a way to better handle crises when they arise. This also involves the cycle of preparedness, response, and

recovery. Finally, we looked at the future outlook of humanitarian action and how vital it is to keep an optimistic outlook. It is easy in our discipline to get discouraged by all the bad news that is highlighted daily. It is essential that we shift our collective focus to what is going right, not all that's going wrong.

Many of us in this room have witnessed first hand the vast global differences of the human condition, in standards of living, availability and access to basic life necessities, in protection from harm's way. But what are we actively going to do about it? I urge you to ask yourself this question as I have upon taking in this day and a half of rich discussion. Give this question serious thought and consideration. As the youth of the world inherit the fruits and the frustrations of tomorrow you must make it a priority to find your place among the responsibility to care for your fellow man, woman, and child. Ensuring protection for others is not only part of the humanitarian principle but it is also a means to ensuring our own protection and well-being.

Again I thank all of the participants for it is because of your collective experiences that we were able to put together this conference and have it serve as a forum for better understanding both the roles of actors like governments, international organizations, and NGOs, but also to examine what our own potential individual roles can be. We are going to need novel perspectives to charge the developments that will power this new millennium. Personally, I am intent on gaining the sort of flexible focus that allows for revolutions. Attitude is the most important thing in life and I have a profound commitment to contribute to the world in a positive way. I know you do too.